

BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The Biscayne National Park (BNP) Fisheries Management Plan Working Group was formed to make recommendations on goals and actions for BNP's Fishery Management Plan, and to comment and make recommendations on portions of BNP's General Management Plan that are pertinent to fisheries. The Working Group consists of diverse members of the stakeholder community, including commercial and recreational fishers, divers, scientists, and representatives of environmental groups (see Appendix 1 for full member list). The Working Group met six times from January to October 2004, with facilitation provided by Janice Fleischer of the South Florida Regional Planning Council's Institute for Community Collaboration, and planning / oversight by Chairman Jack Curlett and the Working Group Organizational Committee (Appendix 2). For the Fishery Management Plan, the Working Group set forth to develop Desired Future Conditions (DFCs) for fished species and fishery resources in BNP, and Action Steps to achieve the DFCs. The DFCs and Action Steps recommended by the Working Group are presented in the following document, categorized by overarching Issue Groups that the Working Group identified as general areas of concern. These issue groups are (1) populations of fish and shellfish impacted by fisheries activities, (2) law enforcement, education and coordination, (3) commercial fishing activity, (4) recreational fishing activity, (5) habitat conditions, and (6) recreational fishing experience. In some cases, timeframes are identified in which Action Steps under each Issue Group should be initiated. When no timeframe is identified, the recommendation is that the Action Steps be implemented as soon as possible following finalization of the Fishery Management Plan.

The Working Group will reconvene to review the BNP Fishery Management Plan (and potentially the General Management Plan) as it continues to be developed, and to generate additional comments and recommendations at those times.

ISSUE GROUP 1 – POPULATIONS OF FISH & SHELLFISH IMPACTED BY FISHERIES ACTIVITIES

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

1.1 - Abundance and size of key / indicator species are increased over a five-year period.

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFC 1.1:

1. Determine and examine the previous record for key indicator species (specified as bonefish, permit, tarpon, shark, snapper, grouper, snook, lobster, shrimp, crabs (blue & stone), mullet (finger), bait species, seatrout, redfish) by utilizing scientific biological sampling, dockside surveys, and species specific harvest data. Where possible for each species, review historical data and establish baselines. Summarize the status of each species annually, prepare an analysis of species standing after five years, and prepare an assessment for each species after 10 years.
2. Implement restrictions by species. Establish local/stakeholder advisory panels (not standing committees) to develop and review management regulations (existing and proposed) for specific species. Consider species-specific spawning season closures.
3. Implement additional restrictions in adjacent State & Federal waters via the FWC and federal rulemaking public processes.
4. Distribute an end-of-season sampling card to license holders to monitor populations.

ISSUE GROUP 2: LAW ENFORCEMENT, EDUCATION AND COORDINATION

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS

2.1 - Park rules and regulations are enforced effectively and uniformly

2.2 - Increased funding for and number of law enforcement officers over current levels.

2.3 - Education and outreach efforts have fostered voluntary protection of Park resources by building support for rules and regulations and responsible behavior on the water.

Note: Education and enforcement are key components to making the entire plan work. To accomplish this, we need to establish a funding structure.

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFCs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3:

1. Establish a permit system for fishing and other water-based activities within BNP.
Under the permit system:

- a. \$25.00 annual permit (by calendar year) for usage of Park per boat. The permit would be required for all vessels involved in recreational activities (e.g., fishing, diving, swimming, birding, etc.) or not underway (with exceptions for boat trouble). The permit would not be required for boaters navigating through, but not utilizing for recreation, the Park. Cost of the permit would be pro-rated depending on date of purchase.
- b. Can obtain more than one sticker per permit if can document owning multiple boats
- c. Permit would also be required for land-based fishing.
- d. Differentiate between residents and visitors
- e. Coordinate efforts with Everglades National Park and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.
- f. Funding generated by permit should be earmarked solely for enforcement and education.
- g. Funds should support additional NPS or Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) law enforcement officers to increase enforcement of regulations pertaining to fish and other resources
- h. BNP should seek funding to develop an educational video on rules and regulations pertaining to fishing, boating and habitat within Park. Once developed, the video should be required viewing for first-time purchasers of the permit; viewing should occur within 12 months of purchase of permit, else permit will be revoked.

The Working Group also recommends that the FWC create a \$2 stamp to be purchased with a state fishing license that would enable the license holder to fish in BNP.

2. Education [concerning both (1) rules and regulations and (2) the importance of being an ecologically responsible park user]
 - a. Place signage and materials in English/Spanish/Creole at all public access ramps and fuel docks leading to BNP explaining all fishing and general regulations pertaining to vessels using Park waters
 - b. Coordinate with appropriate media outlets to disseminate rules and regulations
 - c. Provide education to schools, clubs, vendors, etc.
 - d. Earmark 10% of permit-generated funds to community outreach programs to reach youth
3. Enforcement of Rules and Regulations
 - a. FWCC officers should continue to be cross-deputized to enforce federal and state regulations in BNP
 - b. Establish and enforce strict penalties for all violations, particularly for repeat offenders
 - c. Devise and utilize creative law enforcement approaches

ISSUE GROUP 3 – COMMERCIAL FISHING ACTIVITY

SUB CATEGORY 3.1 Commercial fishers within the Park

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

3.1.1: Reduce adverse impacts of commercial fishing

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFC 3.1.1:

1. Establish a limited, qualified, non-transferable commercial permitting system for the next 5 years in BNP. To be eligible for the permit, commercial fisher must have reported landings within the last 3 years prior to the year of permit establishment in zones 744.4, 744.5 or 744.8 (or, for years prior to the establishment of 744.4, 744.5 or 744.8, zone 744.0).
 - a. Permits are only issued in Year 1 of the initial 5-year period.
 - b. Permits and permit renewals are \$100.
 - c. Permits may not be transferred within the first five years of the program.
 - d. Permits are lost if not used (no reported catch) or renewed annually.
 - e. After 5 years, put a transferable permit system in place that includes fishermen with qualified landings in BISC in zones 744.4/744.5/744.8
 - f. As above, permits are lost if not used (no reported catch) or renewed annually.
 - g. If future research indicates that the number of permits needs to be reduced above and beyond any reductions due to non-use or non-renewal, create a fair and equitable buyout program to reimburse permit-holders unable to transfer their licenses
2. NPS / BNP should work with commercial shrimp trawlers to identify areas being trawled to help later identify management actions and identify areas of user conflicts
3. Restrict traps from hard bottom habitat (limit to sand and grass bottom) via establishment of an FWC or NPS / BNP rule.
4. Consider banning wing nets targeting food shrimp via establishment of an FWC or NPS / BNP rule.
5. Consider establishing fishery-specific boat standards (see Action Steps for DFC 3.2.1) via establishment of an FWC or NPS / BNP rule, or through cooperation with the US Coast Guard, which is responsible for current inspections.

SUB CATEGORY 3.2 Bycatch amount and bycatch-related mortality associated with commercial fishing gear

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

3.2.1 - Minimize adverse effects of bycatch mortality

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFC 3.2.1:

1. For shrimp trawlers, establish an inspection program to check for proper equipment/gear use. Have frequent (at least semi-annual) visual inspection of roller-frame trawls by FWC or NPS. Issue certificates or decals indicating inspections have been passed.
2. Researchers should work with shrimp trawlers to investigate new technologies that can reduce bycatch.
3. NPS should consider stricter gear standards on trawl equipment. Consult with trawlers/shrimp fishermen to identify gear that is damaging, place restrictions as appropriate. Put in place when FMP is implemented. Determine recommended restrictions during scoping/drafting period (see Action Step 5 under DFC 5.2.1 for further detail).
4. Perform more public outreach/education to ensure commercial fishermen are aware of regulations and adverse effects (in English & Spanish). For example, mail summary information to commercial permit holders annually. Implement this process as soon as commercial permit system is established (see 3.1.1).

ISSUE GROUP 4- RECREATIONAL FISHING ACTIVITY

Note: Additional recommendations affecting recreational fishing activity (specifically, recommendations to implement additional regulatory restrictions by species) are included under Issue Group 1.

SUB CATEGORY 4.1 Recreational fishers within the Park

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION #4.1.1: Minimize the adverse impacts of recreational fishing to habitat and fish populations including bycatch mortality.

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFC 4.1.1:

1. Initiate the permit system described under Action Step 1 for DFCs 2.1 – 2.3. Include a \$2 state fishing stamp for BNP.
2. Distribute educational materials at time of sticker (permit) issuance. Ensure recreational fishers know what “bycatch” is and how to handle bycatch.
3. Educate the public about park regulations. Add “Special Regulations Apply” to park signage.
4. Eliminate lobster sport season (“mini-season”) by FWC or BNP regulation (also recommended under DFC 5.2.1).
5. Continue monitoring of recreational catch and effort via creel surveys of recreational anglers.

SUB CATEGORY 4.2 Spearfishing impacts (Previously under HABITAT category)

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

4.2.1 - Minimize the adverse impacts of spearfishing to habitat and fish populations

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFC 4.2.1:

1. Eliminate use of any gear with a trigger mechanism via FWC or BNP regulation. Improve enforcement.
2. Eliminate air equipment for all spear fishing (prohibit the use of scuba gear by spearfishers) via FWC or BNP regulation.

ISSUE GROUP 5: HABITAT CONDITIONS

Sub Category 5.1: Marine Debris

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

5.1.1 - Minimize adverse impacts to habitat from monofilament, stainless hooks, sinkers, traps, nets, trash, ropes, anchors and lines

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFC 5.1.1:

1. Partner with programs like Clean Marina program
2. Establish a required education program before Park use
 - Video (see Action Step #1f for DFCs 2.1 – 2.3)
 - In-school programs
 - Sticker to indicate completion or signed “contract” (like Three Sisters for manatees)
3. Disseminate information re: debris via radio, television and distribution to hotels (including closed circuit hotel television)
 - Work w/NGOs, local groups, networks, DJs, etc.
 - Hotels run on their in-house channel
4. Establish a monitoring program
 - Partner with organizations that already have programs
 - Work with Park users
5. Encourage use of biodegradable fishing materials via educational efforts.
6. Create signage that educates re: marine debris
 - School projects
 - Park “make a sign” contest
 - Work w/NGOs to sponsor signs
 - Apply for grants
7. Marine debris clean-ups (derelict trap clean-ups)
 - Work with students, groups, etc.
 - Park organized activity
 - “Treasure hunt” for key debris
8. Place discard receptacles (monofilament, etc.) in the park.
 - Partner with existing programs
 - Create own receptacles

- "Design a can"

The group also discussed and generally recommended implementing incentives (e.g., reduced fees) for “good behavior” on the water, but did not clarify the specifics of how this approach would work. The group also discussed in general terms implementing or increasing penalties for violations.

Sub Category #5.2: Direct Fishing Impacts

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

5.2.1 - Minimize adverse impacts to habitat from: lobster divers, roller trawlers, prop damage, anchor damage, groundings, spearing and traps

Note: Portions of this DFC (specifically, damage from propellers, anchors and groundings) may be more pertinent to the Biscayne National Park General Management Plan, and should be considered in the development of that plan. The Working Group considered, but opted not to recommend, a Research Natural Area as an Action Step under DFC 5.2.1.

The following Action Steps should be undertaken to accomplish DFC 5.2.1:

1. Research Park topography for fragile (define) areas (e.g. reefs, grass, sand-grass interface) and map within three months of FMP implementation.
 - Aerial survey
 - Underwater survey
 - Use existing habitat maps and ground truth to update
2. Conduct study to gain knowledge on habitat impacts within three months of FMP implementation.
 - Review areas of current use (fisherman reports and other user reports)
 - Underwater survey
 - Commission marine bio team
3. Mark fragile habitat areas with signs/lights or computer within six months of accomplishing Action Steps 1 and 2.
 - Buoys
 - Beacons
 - Lights
4. Eliminate lobster sport season (“mini-season”) by FWC or BNP regulation (also recommended under DFC 4.1.1).

5. Establish gear standards for roller trawls and inspections so gear rolls not drags. Establish workable standards and inspection process for all gear used (also recommended under DFC 3.2.1):
 - Length
 - Width
 - Height
 - Roller diameter
 - Finger bar spacing
6. Establish the permit system described under Issue Group 2. Make permits available by mail, internet and at physical locations.
7. Any state regulations on commercial lobster apply to BNP; where different, BNP should adopt FWC regulations.
8. BNP sets fine \$ if NPS catches State regulation violators (incentives for enforcement); community service in the Park as a consequence of violating any of the new rules (established by BNP regulation).

ISSUE GROUP 6: RECREATIONAL FISHING EXPERIENCE

The Working Group recommends that the park collect baseline data on (1) what is required for a “quality” experience and (2) what proportion of fishers are having a quality experience. The Working Group also recommends that the park provide a feedback critique system for BNP anglers and spearfishers. The information collected should be used to guide management to optimize recreational fishing experience to the extent practicable. The working group recognized that these recommendations might be more applicable to the Biscayne National Park General Management Plan. Thus, these recommendations should also be considered for the GMP.

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